CEREMONIES

I STOOD BEFORE HIM GRINNING, MY UNDERSHORTS AND PANTS WERE down around my knees. I trembled and panted as he stroked me. After weeks of being coaxed and teased to come by, I had finally succumbed to George's suggestions. I had sneaked up to the store very early that morning, before it opened, after my mother left for work.

The sexual hunger that would eventually illuminate my eyes began then. I was a skinny little fourteen-year-old Black boy, growing up in a ghetto that had not yet suffered the fatal wounds and injuries caused by drugs and Black-on-Black crime.

My neighborhood, my immediate homespace, was an oasis of strivers. A majority of the families living on my block owned their homes. My sexual curiosity would have blossomed in any context, but in Southeast Washington, D.C., where I grew up, I had to carefully allow my petals to unfold. If I had revealed them too soon they would surely have been snatched away, brutalized, and scattered down alleys. I was already alert enough to know what happened to the flamboyant boys at the school who were called "sissies" and "faggots." I could not have endured then the violence and indignities they often suffered.

George was at least thirty years older than I, tall, and slightly muscular beneath his oversized work clothes which consisted of khakis, a cotton short-sleeved shirt, and a white apron. He wore black work boots similar to those of construction workers. Many of the boys in the neighborhood teased him viciously, but I hadn't understood before the morning he and I were together just what motivated them